

## A message from the Chief Executive – 12<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Dear colleague,

I hope you and your families are safe and well. The end of another working week in lockdown is drawing near and it has certainly been an interesting few days with lots of twists and turns along the way.

Following discussion with the Cabinet on Wednesday, we shortly afterwards made an announcement which will see all of our household waste recycling centres begin to reopen from Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> May. These sites are likely to be really busy and the tonnages of waste our staff will process will be immense. Although the sites are reopening, we are keen to get the message across that they should only be used if essential (i.e. if the items for disposal are not able to be collected via kerbside collections and cannot be safely stored at home).

Our contact centre is also going to be equally as busy. In the lead up to the opening, there will be lots of communication messages guiding people through the service offer, as it will certainly be a different experience to that offered a few weeks ago. The initial message reached over 80,000 people within 24 hours on social media, generating hundreds of positive comments. Following the virtual meeting the Leader and I held with the Trade unions earlier this week, the Risk Assessment and Safe Working details of the operation will be shared with our Trade Union colleagues in advance of us introducing the service.

The Cabinet also considered some approaches to our library service offer, as you will recall this was one of the services the First Minister indicated we may wish to reintroduce. Again these will be shared with the Trade Unions before we implement the new service offer. As I mentioned in my last update, we need to keep our people focussed on providing the critical services as well as not encourage non-essential journeys. The approach we are intending to take will balance all these factors.

Welsh Government has added many thousands more into the "shielded category" and advised these people to stay home for an extended period. In our county borough, this introduces several hundred more that we are going to need to reach out and check continually that they are ok and have what they need to sustain themselves. Fortunately, our people are doing this fantastically well.

We are also fully engaged in developing an approach for testing and contact tracing. This is, in my opinion, the key to getting on top of the virus as more and more people start to lose patience with lockdown. For me this is crazy – I'd rather continue to hold my patience for a bit longer rather than *become a patient* - any day of the week! There are still some big process issues to work through but there is a national imperative that we make progress and make progress quickly.

Lunchtime today the First Minister introduced his route map that sets out the next steps that we will take as soon as we are ready for a relaxation of the lockdown. The First Minister set out a 'traffic light' system in a document called '*Unlocking our society and economy: continuing the conversation*'. <https://gov.wales/unlocking-our-society-and-economy-wales-roadmap-published>

The red, amber and green traffic light categories will apply across Welsh life, including:

- Reopening schools and childcare facilities
- Seeing family and friends
- Getting around
- Playing sport games and relaxing
- Working or running a business
- Going shopping
- Using public services
- Practicing faith and special occasions

Importantly no dates have been set, as this will all depend upon the rate of spread of the infection – that infamous “R” number. We are prepared for any change in direction and we have planned for a return to our full service offer, albeit, operating with a very different approach. i.e. social distancing, maximising agile working and minimising the number of staff required to work in our buildings. We are also planning how we can encourage people to use our local economy, when businesses reopen and we are developing transportation plans, that will consider how we can consider social distancing, maximising opportunities for walking and cycling and the use of public transport.

Additionally, the Education Minister announced today a Framework that sets out a series of questions that will need to be considered and answered in order to inform any decisions that the Minister will make with regard to any potential return to school.

<https://gov.wales/education-minister-sets-out-thinking-return-schools>

This Framework was developed by a cross-section of Education advisors, including myself, over the past few weeks. I think a return to school is very unlikely to happen anytime soon - the end of June I suspect, at the earliest. I've attached a link for you to take a look at below, it's about a school in Denmark and how it has managed a return back to school for pupils and staff. I'm not suggesting that this is the way we will do things here, but it gives a valuable insight into how it could look in our schools over the next few months. I just want to reiterate that no decisions have been made as yet and both the safety of children, staff and parents will not be compromised in anything we do. Our approach will bring absolute clarity, calmness and confidence to everyone involved.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-europe-52649919/coronavirus-inside-a-reopened-primary-school-in-the-time-of-covid-19>

I have shared with you on many occasions, how important your physical and mental wellbeing is and how taking some time out is an essential requirement for each of us. Whilst I understand that many of us will not be jet-setting off to hotter climates this year, taking a break from the working environment is a must, especially during these intense times. As such I wanted to share with you, that our annual leave policy still applies, therefore carry-over of leave remains at a maximum of 5 days. It is so important that you take leave for the reasons I have already outlined. So, I am encouraging all staff to take your annual leave rather than stock pile it and then possibly lose it.

I will of course, continue to review the position should we have any future peaks of the virus, as I accept the overall position could change. However, the current position is that only exceptional cases to carry over in excess of 5 days will be considered and these will need to be discussed directly with HR and Directors. However, I want to emphasise that this would not include situations where staff just choose not to take annual leave during the year.

So the message is clear, please use your leave to protect your mental and physical well-being. Use your leave – don't lose it!

Hope you have a lovely weekend – take care, stay safe and stay well.

Regards  
Christina